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ABSTRACT

Student portfolios provide information for the teacher, help children question and reflect on their work, communicate progress and growth to parents and teachers, and are useful in developing and evaluating children's school programs. To obtain a more adequate notion of what a student portfolio is, it is useful to ask five questions: (1) What do portfolios look like? (2) How is a portfolio organized? (3) What contents are included in a portfolio? (4) What type of selection process could one use to determine the portfolio's contents? and (5) How will the portfolio be evaluated and reported? These questions are discussed. (RH)

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Developing Student Portfolios for Young Children: A Grading, Marking and Reporting Alternative That Fosters Communication with Families

A Conference Paper

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this conference paper is to share with other campus child care directors and staff, the values of using student portfolios, how they can build teacher parent comunications and what comprises a student portfolio.

A tool that not only provides information for the teacher, but helps children question and reflect on their own work, and one that can communicate progress and growth to parents and teachers could be of great advantage in developing and evaluating the child's school program. One such tool that provides these benefits is the student portfolio.

What is a student portfolio?

The student portfolio is more than accumulating a lot of the child's work and putting it into a file. It is an organized collection of data (child's work) used by the student, teacher, student's parents and future teachers to ascertain and report the student's achievement, skills, attitudes and interests over a period of time. It is a representative of all the processes and products involved in the child's educational program. It also serves as the basis for ongoing evaluation and planning.

Traditionally, portfolios have been used by professionals such as writers, actors, and artists. Young and old artists rely on portfolios to demonstrate their skills, and achievements and showcase their work (Valencia, 1990). Portfolios can help provide artists with new insights, greater precision and technique, new organizational skills, new interests and valuable analysis of one's growth and development. More teachers ands educational organizations see the value of portfolios and are advocating their use in an effort to assess and report what and how

well students are learning (Wolf, 1989). Student portfolios can be developed in the same way as artists, writers and actors.

Developing and implementing portfolios requires planning, time, patience, organization and cooperation from students and teachers. Many early childhood educators understand the concept of a portfolio, but are not sure of what's involved in developing and using the portfolio in the early childhood classroom. This conference paper will help early childhood educators address questions they may have about portfolios and how they can implement the student portfolio and report progress in the classroom.

Before developing a student portfolio it would be helpful to examine and explore the following questions.

I. What do portfolios look like?

II. How is a portfolio organized?

III. What contents are included in a portfolio?

IV. What type of selection process could one use to determine the portfolio's contents?

V. How will the portfolio be evaluated and reported?

I. What do portfolios look like?

Portfolios are more than just containers, files or a collection of the students' performance. Physically it can be more like an expandable file of folders that includes

samples of student's works documenting performance, growth and development over a period of time. It can be arranged according to subject area, developmental knowledge, skills or daily progress.

Portfolios should be placed in a section of the classroom that is accessible to all students, teachers, and families. A "portfolio center" can be designated for in the classroom. The location should be a space that will motivate students and teachers to contribute and share new documents/evidence of student growth and development on an ongoing basis and to reflect on the basis of the information accumulated.

II. How is a portfolio organized?

A portfolio is an accumulation of data utilized by the early childhood educator and student to record and reflect the growth of the student's cognitive, social, emotional, physical and creative development. A portfolio for young children might be organized to include the following distinct sections:

"I am Growing"

a) I can think and use language (literacy, language, problem solving, decision making, classification, sequencing, etc.).

b) I can work/play with others (social attitudes, cooperation, sharing, etc.).

c) I have feelings (personal attitudes and interests).

d) I can create (art and self expressive products).

e) I can move (fine and gross motors).

f) I have a family (parent observations, records of parent-teacher collaborations and parent-teacher correspondence).

III. What contents are included in a Portfolio?

Portfolios represent the students' social, cognitive, emotional, creative and physical performance and developments pertinent to the learning activities experienced in the early childhood education environments. Students can select and place independently and or with teacher guidance samples of their daily work experiences within the portfolio structure. For example, the contents could include:

1. samples of student's work selected by the student or with teacher guidance.
   a) samples from writings
   b) audiotapes of storytelling or show and tell reporting
   c) photos of experiments or projects
   d) drawings of stories
   e) drawings, collages
   f) self expressive projects

g) lists of written words

h) videotapes of projects

2. teacher observations

a) anecdotal observation records

example

2/15/91 Nikki has had fun with our Valentine's day activities. She shared her Valentines with her friends.

2/15/91 Tyler has really been enjoying our transportation theme. He likes pretending he's a motorcycle.

b) checklists (developmental, criterion referenced, teacher developed or see Gelfer (1991).

3. student's own periodic self evaluations reported by teacher

a) attitude inventories

(e.g., questions may include: Do you have a hobby? If so, what is your hobby? What is your favorite book? What do you like to do after school? Do you watch television? What is your favorite food? What is your favorite toy?)

b) interest inventories

(e.g., questions may include: How do you feel about going to School? How do you feel about playing with blocks? How do you feel about watching Walt Disney Movies at home? How do you feel about your teacher? How do you feel about nap time?

4. progress notes contributed by the student and teacher collectively.
5. log books- (vocabulary growth, books listened to and told to the class or new projects)
6. parent observations- (parents should be invited to make an observation of their child's developmental behavior; Observation could be made in the family's house or family outings) (e.g., Family went to zoo today. Sacha watched the gorillas for 15 minutes and wrote a story about them when we returned home.)
7. parent teacher conferences (summaries of reports)
8. parent teacher communications (lists and descriptions of telephone conversations, brief discussions, notes, reports and etc.

Portfolios provide opportunities for students to select works that they perceive to be reflective of their best works, allow students to become part of the assessment

process, and focus their attention on how their work has changed over a period of time.

IV. What type of selection process could you use to determine the portfolio's content?

Teachers need to establish a system for deciding how and when student's performance, growth and development can be selected and placed in the portfolio during the school year. Some teachers feel that students should have the responsibility for what is placed in the portfolios, whereas others feel items can be selected by teachers with the students. In addition, some teachers encourage parents to contribute to the child's portfolio. Ideally, children should be encouraged to take responsibility for contributing to their portfolio to some extent. Each new school year should include an orientation to students describing what some of their responsibilities are. Students can be informed that they are going to help construct a portfolio file where both the teacher and student will choose new projects and work that will be collected over the year. The portfolio file cover can be embellished and designed by each child. After a student has completed a project or a new work, these documents could be placed in the front of the file. Teachers can organize each work at the end of the day into the designated sections such as I can think and use language, I can create, I can work and play

with others and etc.

Every two weeks teacher and student can meet for approximately 3 to 5 minutes discussing and reflecting upon the materials selected for the file. Materials can be discussed and students can select their best work to be placed in the portfolio. The teacher can reflect upon the student's works by generating an evaluative statement pertinent to the selected work. Students may provide their own evaluation statement concerning their portfolio entrees. All materials should be dated and a description written by the teacher explaining reasons for selecting the samples. The materials not selected for the portfolio can be taken home. Any documents can be removed that appear to be redundant or that are identified by the student as less creative or qualitative.

During these conferences students are given the opportunity for sharing all the works they have included over a two week period. Teachers need to encourage students to select and identify their favorite things for the portfolio and remove the projects that are least favorite. Once these materials have been removed the remaining materials become permanent and the selection cycle begins again. Portfolios should be viewed as a representation of the child's growth and accomplishments. Portfolios can help early childhood educators and students share reactions and comments regarding the students'

performance. This information can provide new insights for planning new experiences and improving instruction for each student.

V. How will the portfolio be evaluated and reported?

Portfolios for young children can be evaluated on growth demonstrated by each individual as documented by his/her portfolio. Developmental knowledge identified by developmental checklists and tests can be used as measures to exemplify progress that has been made. Summaries of the evidence demonstrated in the portfolio could address the child's social and emotional development, work habits, literacy and language development, problem solving, decision making, and etc. Portfolios should be discussed with parents at least 2 times a year or at the parent's request and final contents should be selected by teacher, parent and student. This portfolio should then be passed on to the child's teacher for the upcoming year.

Using portfolios in the young child's early education helps the teacher plan and organize experiences for young children, helps the child reflect on his/her own progress, and communicates to parents and future teachers. Young children can become involved in evaluating and planning their work. Portfolios require time and organization on the part of both the teacher and student, however, the opportunities they provide seem to be well worth the investment. A

portfolio represents the process and products of learning and helps build a collaborative effort between the teacher and student in the evaluation of his/her growth and development. Using student portfolios provides flexibility, collaboration and documentation of the young child's progress and can be beneficial to the educator, parents and child.

In closing, parents are the most significant influence in a child's life. The early childhood program should make every effort to plan strategies which will foster an understanding of the values, experiences and the growth of the educational program. Communication between parents and teachers is important in guiding and facilitating the child's growth, development and learning. If a child's potential is enhanced by an early childhood program, the parents must have a better understanding of their child's personal development and the school's program, activities and teaching and learning styles (Gelfer & Perkins, 1987). A tool, such as the portfolio, provides information for the teacher to help a child question and reflect on his/her own work. It also can communicate progress and growth to parents and teachers which can be a great advantage in encouraging a child's growth and development.

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